

Fear Not, Stand Firm, and See The Salvation of the Lord  
Exodus 13:17-14:14  
August 9, 2020  
Rev. Dave Dorst  
CenterPoint Church

Read Exodus 13:17-14:14

("The grass withers and the flower falls but the word of the Lord endures forever")

## **Introduction**

How good are you at following someone in your car? When my twin brother and I went to Baylor University in central Texas, my parents lived in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida for most of our time there. We found a few other Baylor students who lived in Florida and would often carpool the 22 hours that it took to drive to and from school. And sometimes we had friends come with us to Florida for Spring Break (whatever your visions of wild Spring Breaks in south Florida are, dial them way back). So we got really good at following each other, as this was in the early 90s before cell phones and GPS. If we lost one another, we would just have to hope we caught up to each other, which was not likely, so we learned to follow well. Not too close that you'd cause an accident, but close enough that cars and trucks weren't constantly cutting in between and separating you.

My parents were not so good at this skill. To be fair, maybe they were, but the story that sticks out in my mind is that when we moved from Pittsburgh to Houston, Texas in the summer of 1985, we were going to take two cars: one driven by my dad and one by my mom. Again, keep in mind: no cell phones. When we left our house all packed up, the two cars were facing different ways. Here's where the stories differ, because my dad thought they were supposed to drive around the block and meet up and then start caravanning. My mom thought something else. One car went back and waited while the other pressed on assuming they had to catch up. Bottom line, we drove the entire 1,300 miles without finding one another.

Sometimes it's hard to follow or be lead on a journey. In our Scripture text this morning, the Israelite community has left Egypt where they had dwelt for over 400 years, and they are being led by God to the Promised Land. But God didn't just lead them with verbal instructions to Moses. No, God made the journey with them, moving ahead of them as a cloud in the daytime and fire at night. His presence would reassure them and make it abundantly clear. There was no chance that the Israelites would lose track of their leader and nobody would get in between them. Even though God took them the long way, Israel followed because He had brought them out of Egypt and would lead them to the Promised Land.

My three points this morning emphasize the backwards, counter-intuitive nature of how the Israelites proceeded: 1) Taking the Long Way, 2) Getting Trapped on Purpose, and 3) Fighting Back by Doing Nothing. Let's read the end of chapter 13 again to understand why they were

### **I. Taking the Long Way (13:17-22)**

*17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." 18 But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. 19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here." 20 And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. 21 And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along*

*the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.* <sup>22</sup> *The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.*

Have you thought much about where you want to be buried? That becomes a complicated question the more our culture moves around with ease, as families get uprooted often, with people living in multiple areas and states throughout their careers. If you have a family history that centers around one town, maybe you'd want to be buried there. Or maybe it's wherever you end up last – retired in Florida or Delaware. Or where you spent the longest time and raised a family. It's a really interesting note in verse 19 that Moses carried Joseph's bones up out of Egypt. I have this image of a fancy box with his bones, but Genesis 50 says that Joseph had been embalmed and placed in a coffin, so perhaps he was wrapped like a mummy. That promise that Joseph had his brothers make to take his bones out of Egypt was made close to 400 years before. How many of us are thinking about the promises made by our ancestors in the early to mid-1600s? It was important to Joseph that his body not be left in Egypt when all of his descendants would leave; he was claiming the promises that God would deliver His people way before it happened. Moses was a man of honor and made that a priority.

You can look on a map and trace a direct route from Egypt to Canaan just south of the Mediterranean Sea and it's a couple hundred miles. I've heard that it could have taken the people as little as two weeks to walk to the Promised Land. God's leading the people the long way to Canaan was because they were not physically and mentally prepared for battle and opposition that they would encounter if they took the direct route, the northern route along the Mediterranean, what the text calls the "land of the Philistines." Apparently, Egypt had military outposts in that area as well. It was not the safe route, so God led the people south.

As we'll see in later parts of Exodus and the other books of Moses, the people were not spiritually ready to enter the promised land either. God had a lot of work to do to prepare them, including delivering the Ten Commandments and the law to them. Hebrews 3:9-11: *"...your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore, I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"* So what could have taken a few weeks got stretched into 40 years.

Now that Israel is on the move, though, God proposes an interesting strategic move:

## **II. Getting Trapped on Purpose (14:1-9)**

*<sup>1</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. <sup>3</sup> For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' <sup>4</sup> And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so. <sup>5</sup> When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" <sup>6</sup> So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, <sup>7</sup> and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. <sup>8</sup> And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. <sup>9</sup> The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.*

We were having a lawn service mow our grass before we moved into our new house and as we were settling in. But when we were here a while, I cancelled the service, figuring that was one thing we could do and not spend the money. But then we had lots of company, lots of rain, went on vacation...

and I wish that I hadn't cancelled our lawn service. That's a goofy way to transition to Pharaoh's mindset. The last time that we saw Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, he was broken in his grief over losing his son and had finally dismissed the Israelites, sending them out of the land. But Pharaoh apparently either got over his grief or his grief turned to anger and disbelief. Either way, the Lord hardened his heart for the last time. And Pharaoh smacked his forehead and thought, "What was I thinking letting my work force march out of here? We need to get them back!" So he mobilized his troops, all the king's horses and all the king's men.

Knowing that the enemy had decided to come after the Hebrews, God has Moses take the people to camp in front of the sea to make it look like they're trapped, that they got lost and will be easy pickings for his army to round them up and take them back to Egypt. We don't know exactly where any of these three places mentioned in verse 2 are: Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal-zephon. Migdol can mean tower, Baal is the false god; there are clues, but we don't know exactly. We do know that Moses has recorded their position, and his original audience would have understood how they were trapped. But what looks like a trap for the weak nation on foot is actually a trap for the powerful army on horseback and chariot.

Pharaoh has given his army attack orders, now Moses gives Israel its orders. They will be

### **III. Fighting By Doing Nothing (14:10-14)**

*<sup>10</sup> When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." <sup>13</sup> And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."*

How quickly the people go from faith to fear! The people of Israel have just seen God devastate the land of Egypt with ten overwhelming plagues. Some call them natural disasters and try to explain them away as seasonal phenomena, but they were anything but natural. They were supernatural, caused by the hand of God. And the people of Israel had been spared and set free. And verse 8 says the Israelites left Egypt "defiantly," which could mean triumphantly or confidently. But then they saw Pharaoh coming after them with his huge army moving much faster than the Hebrews on foot and they're terrified. These are the very dramatic scenes in the Exodus movies where it cuts back and forth between the Israelites plodding through the wilderness with scenes of the Egyptian chariots racing to catch up; then when the Israelites realize that they're being pursued they get the panicked looks and start walking faster. Apparently the chariot was a pretty recent invention, so it was the most advanced military weapon. The Israelites do not have a warrior mentality, they've been slaves for so long they quickly revert to despair and assume their exodus is over and death is coming.

They throw some pretty thick sarcasm Moses' way, v. 11: "*Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?*" This is particularly ironic because the Egyptians were obsessed with death and the pyramids were basically giant tombs, right? So, of course, there were plenty of graves back in Egypt. Then verse 12: "*For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.*" That statement is not exactly Patrick Henry's declaration, "Give me liberty or give me death," is it?<sup>1</sup> This actually comes up a few more times as the Israelites

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Prager, *Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2018), p. 162.

wander for 40 years, complaining that being back in slavery in Egypt would be preferable to the hardships and uncertainty of the wilderness. It all reveals how much fear controlled their thoughts and attitudes. You know it's fear talking when you would rather go back to being enslaved than live in freedom. Freedom is always going to have uncertainty and require trust.

There's a problem when you just look at your enemies and not at your Great Ally. Remember when the Israelite army in 1 Samuel 17 is looking at Goliath as this 9 ft. tall monster and they're scared to death and David strolls in and says, "God's one our side, we're winning this one." Or in Numbers 13 and 14 when the 12 spies get sent into the Promised Land and 10 of them come back with a report that the inhabitants in the land are too strong for them, but the other two, Caleb and Joshua, say "if the Lord is with us, we'll defeat them and take the land." So Moses has to play that role now. He has to lift their eyes above their desperate circumstances and remind them they have a God who is greater than even the most powerful army. Moses has learned his lesson ever since he took criticism early on and turned around and complained to God about it. Now, he is steady and firm: "Don't fear, stand firm, God will fight for you and save you. Your whole part in this is to shut up."

### **Conclusion:**

We can't apply every verse spoken to Israel directly to us, but in this case we actually get a pretty profound statement of how our salvation works: "*Fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you.*" We don't do anything, God fights on our behalf, accomplishes the victory, hands us our freedom, and we have only to believe and rejoice. We can't win the battle for our salvation in our own strength. We are trapped and condemned by the forces of evil, sin, and death. But Jesus lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death on our behalf to defeat them. Scripture says that salvation is not something we do but something we receive. It is God's work on our behalf, accomplished through Jesus.

What about our part in doing things for God, though? There is lots of work to do, Ephesians 2:10 says that we are to do "*good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*" And there are all kinds of commands in the New Testament about avoiding sin, loving one another, showing hospitality and kindness to one another and to strangers. Why are we commanded to do all of that but it doesn't add anything to our salvation? Because salvation is a free gift that Jesus accomplished for us, and those good works are the fruits that result from our being saved and changed. Please don't mix those up, don't think you have to work for your salvation. You have to acknowledge Jesus as your Savior and Lord, acknowledge that you are a sinner and His death saves you, receive the new life in the Spirit, and then your works and your actions will be meaningful. After all, the Israelites were not in the Promised Land yet, they had a lot of work to do to get there. But God was going to do the work rescuing them.

Let me say that all a different way. A lot of you got a text yesterday that said: "*Hi, how are you? I need a favor from you, please text back as soon as you get this message. -Pastor Dave Dorst*" Except that it did not come from my normal cell number. So I started getting texts in the afternoon – "is this actually from you?" So we had to text and email everybody that it was a fake text, that someone was phishing to get you to respond; so please don't respond. I don't know what they'll do if you text back, from what I've read I think they are trying to get you to give them some sensitive information. Hopefully nobody had an issue, please contact me if you did. And cyber criminals, if you're listening: "Please use your powers for good and not evil." That whole incident gave me a sermon illustration, though, here's where my mind went: Many of us receive false messages purporting to be from God that say "*In order for me to love you, you have to earn my love. You have to clean yourself off, fix your own problems, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, and then maybe after I've looked over your resume and searched your*

*heart, I might accept you as being good enough to become a Christian and get into heaven.” Isn’t that essentially what “works righteousness” teaches us? It’s not so blunt sometimes, but the message is that we have to do enough things and be good enough to win God’s approval and His love. But that is the deep fake that false religion and scam Christianity try to teach you. And it’s often not malicious on their part, it’s misunderstanding the Bible’s teachings. The real message from God says, “Salvation is my gift to you that Jesus accomplished and the Holy Spirit works in your life. You are loved, not because you earned it or deserve it, but because I chose to pour my love out on you. Welcome to my family, come as you are!”*

*(transition to communion liturgy)*

This table is the Lord’s table. It is the table where we have a family meal, because we are members of God’s family when we are saved and adopted.

It is not CenterPoint Church’s table, it’s not a Presbyterian table; if you are a member of a Bible-believing church (or pursuing membership), we invite you to partake of these elements. We will come up a row at a time to pick up a set, then we will take them together.

**That the Lord Jesus Christ on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, gave it to His disciples, as I, ministering in His name, give this bread to you, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me”**

**In the same manner, He also took the cup, and having given thanks as has been done in His name, He gave it to the disciples, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Drink from it, all of you.**

Benediction

Ephesians 6:23-24

*“Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”*

*“Come as you are, Grow in grace and truth, and Go as Jesus says.”*